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NEW YORK (AP) -- A FORMER SOVIET OFFICIAL WHO DEFECTED TO THE WEST SAYS SOVIET LEADER YURI ANDROPOV GOT WHERE HE IS LARGELY WITH THE HELP OF A BRITISH "MOLE," HAROLD "KIM" PHILBY.

VLADIMIR SAKHAROV, WHO DEFECTED TO THE UNITED STATES IN THE EARLY 1970S, SAYS PHILBY HELPED ANDROPOV TURN THE KGB FROM A "COLLECTION OF CLUMSY THUGS" INTO AN EFFECTIVE INTELLIGENCE OPERATION.

THIS GAVE ANDROPOV THE POWER THAT EVENTUALLY MADE HIM SUCCESSOR TO THE LATE LEONID I. BREZHNEV AS COMMUNIST PARTY LEADER, SAKHAROV SAID.

WRITING IN THE CURRENT ISSUE OF PENTHOUSE MAGAZINE, SAKHAROV ALSO CREDITS PHILBY WITH DEVELOPING ANDROPOV'S WESTERN TASTES IN DRESS, MUSIC AND DRINK.

PHILBY HAD BEEN A SOVIET SPY IN THE HEART OF THE BRITISH INTELLIGENCE SERVICE FOR TWO DECADES WHEN HE FLED TO MOSCOW IN 1963.

"FROM THE MOMENT HE ARRIVED IN MOSCOW, HE HAD BECOME AN IMPORTANT MEMBER OF THE KGB'S INNER CIRCLE AND EVENTUALLY WOUND UP AS THE CENTRAL FIGURE IN THE BUILDUP OF THAT AGENCY INTO WHAT IS OFTEN CONSIDERED THE WORLD'S MOST FORMIDABLE INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION," SAKHAROV SAID.

IN 1965, HE SAID, "ANDROPOV WAS FORMALLY NAMED TO THE JOB OF GETTING THE KGB STRAIGHTENED OUT, AND ONE OF HIS FIRST MOVES WAS TO BRING IN PHILBY AS ONE OF HIS CHIEF ADVISERS...TO TELL HIM HOW THE KGB SHOULD LOOK AND OPERATE, ESPECIALLY IN WESTERN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES.

"KGB OFFICERS SOON BEGAN TO WEAR EXPENSIVE WESTERN-STYLE CLOTHES, DISPLAY POLISHED MANNERS, APPEAR EXTREMELY SOPHISTICATED....IN EFFECT, PHILBY BEGAN TO TRANSFORM THE KGB INTO AN IMITATION OF THE INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION THAT HE -- AND MANY RUSSIAN OFFICIALS -- REGARDED AS THE IDEAL: THE COOL, CORRECT BRITISH INTELLIGENCE AGENT IN HIS SAVILE ROW SUIT," SAID SAKHAROV.

AT THE SAME TIME, HE SAID, ANDROPOV "BECAME WESTERNIZED BY THE EXPERIENCE WITH PHILBY." SAKHAROV DESCRIBED ANDROPOV'S APARTMENT, WITH A RECORD COLLECTION OF AMERICAN JAZZ, AS LOOKING AS IF IT WERE TRANSPLANTED FROM MANHATTAN.

IN LESS THAN THREE YEARS THE KGB REPUTATION WAS BUILT "TO SOMETHING LIKE THE IMAGE ENJOYED BY THE AMERICAN FBI IN THE YEARS BEFORE WATERGATE," SAKHAROV SAID.